

SARCOPHILUS URSINUS.

Ursine Sarcophilus.

Didelphis ursina, Harris in Linn. Trans., vol. ix. p. 176. pl. 19. fig. 2.

Dasyurus ursinus, Geoff. Ann. du Mus., tom. xv. p. 305.—Temm. Mon. de Mamm., tom. i. p. 69.—Waterh. Nat. Lib. *Marsupialia*, p. 128.

Diabolus ursinus, Gray in App. to Grey's Journ. of Two Exp. to N.W. and W. Australia, p. 400. No. 12.—List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus., p. 97.

Dasyurus (Sarcophilus) ursinus, Waterh. Nat. Hist. Mamm., vol. i. p. 448.

Devil and *Native Devil* of the Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

THE Ursine Sarcophilus was one of the first of the native quadrupeds encountered by the early settlers in Van Diemen's Land, from whom its black colouring and unsightly appearance obtained for it the trivial names of Devil and Native Devil. It has now become so scarce in all the cultivated districts, that it is rarely, if ever, seen there in a state of nature; there are yet, however, large districts in Van Diemen's Land untrodden by man; and such localities, particularly the rocky gullies and vast forests on the western side of the island, afford it a secure retreat. During my visit to the continent of Australia I met with no evidence that the animal is to be found in any of its colonies, consequently Tasmania alone must be regarded as its native habitat.

In its disposition it is untameable and savage in the extreme, and is not only destructive to the smaller kangaroos and other native quadrupeds, but assails the sheep-folds and hen-roosts whenever an opportunity occurs for its entering upon its destructive errand.

Although the animal has been well known for so many years, little or nothing more has been recorded respecting it than that which appeared in the ninth volume of the Linnean Society's Transactions from the pen of Mr. Harris, who states:—

“These animals were very common on our first settling at Hobart Town, and were particularly destructive to poultry, &c. They, however, furnished the convicts with a fresh meal, and the flesh was said to be not unlike veal. As the settlement increased, and the ground became cleared, they were driven from their haunts near the town to the deeper recesses of the forests yet unexplored. They are, however, easily procured by setting a trap in the most unfrequented parts of the woods, baited with raw flesh, all kinds of which they eat indiscriminately and voraciously; they also, it is probable, prey on dead fish, blubber, &c., as their tracks are frequently found on the sands of the sea-shore.

“In a state of confinement they appear to be untameably savage, biting severely, and uttering at the same time a low yelling growl. A male and a female which I kept for a couple of months chained together in an empty cask, were continually fighting; their quarrels began as soon as it was dark (as they slept all day), and continued throughout the night almost without intermission, accompanied by a kind of hollow barking not unlike that of a dog, and sometimes a sudden kind of snorting, as if the breath was retained a considerable time and then suddenly expelled. They frequently sat on their hind parts, and used their fore paws to convey food to their mouths. The muscles of the jaws were very strong, as they cracked the largest bones asunder with ease.”

Mr. Gunn remarks, that notwithstanding their comparatively small size, they are so fierce and bite so severely, that they are a match for any ordinary-sized dog.

The fur is coarse, moderate in length, and black, excepting on the head, tail and under parts of the body; a broad white band usually crosses the chest, and extends backwards on either side, more or less, over the base of the fore leg; and a second crosses the back near the root of the tail; the nose, the ears and the soles of the feet are of a fleshy pink.

Much diversity exists in the colouring of different individuals; in fact, scarcely two are found precisely alike; some being uniformly black, while others are crossed with bands of pure white; some having a white patch on the chest only, while others have a band of white stretching round the neck; and others again patches of the same hue across the fore or hind legs, or both.

Mr. Waterhouse states that a very fine specimen, which died in the menagerie of the Zoological Society, measured from the tip of the nose to the root of the tail 23 inches 9 lines; from the root to the tip of the tail 11 inches, and round the body at the chest 20 inches.

The drawing on the accompanying Plate was made by Mr. H. C. Richter, from a fine living specimen in the menagerie of the Zoological Society, and represents the animal about two-thirds of the natural size.